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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (HUNTER), AF/EPS (BREITER/POTASH)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ECON ETRD SL

SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT AGOA FORUM

REF: FREETOWN 380

¶1. Summary: Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) officials on July 31 expressed gratitude to the Ambassador for facilitating their participation in the recent AGOA Forum, and shared preliminary plans to capitalize on AGOA opportunities. Both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry expressed their thanks for the Forum, and desire to actively engage with the USG on AGOA-related matters. End Summary.

¶2. Ambassador Perry, DCM, Poloff, and Deskoff met with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Zainab Bangura on July 31 (meeting details to be reported septel). Minister Bangura noted the helpful nature of the AGOA Forum for GoSL delegate members, with the result that the Ministers of Finance and Trade and Industry will be accompanying President Koroma on his first official visit to the United States in September for follow-up meetings (see reftel). According to the Foreign Minister, President Koroma will address a forum encouraging further foreign investment in Sierra Leone convened by former Assistant USTR Representative Rose Whitaker while he is in Washington.

¶3. DCM, Poloff, and Deskoff also met with Deputy Minister for Trade and Industry Mabinty Daramy on July 31. Deputy Minister Daramy attended the AGOA Forum and found the session on foreign direct investment and the manufacturing sector particularly helpful. She met with the African Development Foundation (ADF) President to discuss potential support for investing in small businesses and assistance for marginalized groups. Deputy Minister Daramy is pushing the Minister of Trade and Industry to establish an AGOA Desk to better enable the GoSL to take advantage of AGOA benefits. She also asked for increased U.S. advocacy in promoting investment in Sierra Leone, and requested that USG web-based public reports not refer to Sierra Leone as "post-conflict" or dangerous. DCM, Poloff, and Deputy Minister Daramy agreed to conduct a joint visit to a textiles manufacturing plant in the near future as a way of examining AGOA opportunities further.

¶4. Comment: The Koroma administration is intent on building the country's commercial and manufacturing sectors and increasing investment. The AGOA forum sparked greater GoSL interest in ways to accomplish those goals, but will likely require further technical assistance and encouragement from the Mission to turn that interest into action. End Comment.

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